**Writing a Literature Review**

**Conducting a Literature Search**

Writing a literature review can be daunting, I recommend starting early and breaking the process into parts:

1. Write 1 paragraph to 1 page on the problem you want to solve, question you want to answer, behavior you want to explain/understand, etc. Note your current knowledge of the issue and areas for exploration and development. Consider which databases (e.g., PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES) and resources will be useful for gathering articles, books, chapters.
2. Gather articles on the topic. Track your searches. Which terms have you searched? How have your combined those terms? Which databases did you use?
3. **Thoroughly** readthe articles. Consider how they agree, disagree, use different perspectives, and complement each other. If they disagree, how are the studies designed differently? Are there different measures, manipulations, data collection methods, populations, or statistical controls? What (who) are the common terms, theories, perspectives, and authors across the articles?
4. Organize your resources into an annotated outline or bibliography. Are there topics you missed? Do some topics need more resources? Do you have a clear structure for your topics? Do you notice gaps in the literature?
   1. You might use folders on your computer for topics, an Excel document, tools like Zotero (<https://www.zotero.org/>) or EndNote (<http://infoguides.wtamu.edu/endnote>), etc.
   2. <http://guides.lib.umich.edu/citationmanagementoptions>
5. Start writing sections of the literature review and return to the literature as need to ensure sections are thorough and well supported.
6. Continue to refine your research question and add terms, theories, and authors as you learn the literature.
7. Finalize your research question or hypothesis based on your now more informed understanding of the concepts and related literature.
8. Write the methods section of the paper. Consider potential weaknesses, and update your method if possible to address them. Consider alternative explanations, and include measures or manipulations to rule them out.
9. Take a break for a few days. Print your paper. Read, edit, and revise. Then, print it for a classmate and ask for edits. Revise.

**Annotated Outline or Bibliography**

<http://lib.skidmore.edu/library/index.php/li371-annotated-bib>

<http://guides.library.cornell.edu/annotatedbibliography>

<http://sites.umuc.edu/library/libhow/bibliography_tutorial.cfm>

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/03/>

**Outline**

Identify the major topics/themes

Consider what topic is most central to your research question; This topic will likely come first after the introduction

Organize the remaining topics so the focus throughout the literature review narrows and naturally arrives at your research question and hypotheses

Identify how you will use the studies from your annotated bibliography within this outline

Are there sections of the outline that need additional literature/support?

Are there gaps in your outline where subsections or related topics are missing?

**Writing the Literature Review**

Basic Skills in MS Word: <http://guides.lib.umich.edu/word2010>

Resources: <https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/ReviewofLiterature.html>

Introduction

Provide larger context/value for research (Sell it, hook the audience)

Identify focus using topic sentence

Clarify the scope of the review; this will likely outline the topics of the literature review

Present the conclusion (research question)

Body: Determined by relevant topics, theories, etc.

Present the topics in the same order as they are presented in the introduction

Be sure to present related literature that may counter your expectation

Conclusion: <http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/conclusion>

Identify gaps or conflicts within the literature

Connect those gaps/conflicts to your research question

Present clear, explicit hypotheses (expectations) related to research question